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# LETTER FROM IRELAND, 1973

It is sad to relate that since my last letter the political situation in Northern Ireland is unchanged, if not worsened, as attitudes harden all the time. The socio-economic roots of these troubles were planted 300 years ago and can hardly be healed in a short time. However, this year Great Britain and the Irish Republic have joined the European Economic Community, making us partners in one field at least. In the same vein we have had a change of government after 14 years to a coalition dedicated to bringing our social services up to the standards set by the British National Health Service. This could be seen helping in some way towards a future United Ireland, but as I write virtually the entire population has been declared eligible for free hospital services, even though the accommodations may not be yet available. This could go hard for specialists in a mixed private and state practice since most of their income comes from the former class which is now declared eligible for free service. However, most of these people had private health insurance and will no doubt continue to opt for what it offers; but we do begin to simulate the British National Health Service, and this includes the north of Ireland. One might exclude provision of free contraceptive advice and abortion virtually on demand. But it is as well to appreciate that the Northern Protestants see the United Ireland as a Catholic camp where they would be snowed under, having neither political nor religious freedom. Thus one can visualize the dismay with which Northerners view Southern television when members of religious orders (priests and nuns) are often seen taking part in the various socially oriented and religious programs. Sad to relate they do not have a very high rating — the young particularly switching off this reminder of their schooldays and showing their independence from formal religion. Since our new government is planning a greater exchange of programs and views in television and radio with the United Kingdom, they will naturally have to take this into account, as also will the hierarchy who realize the value of this form of communication and how important it is to use it to counteract the many false ideas based on humanism and downright paganism which are prevalent. Even the Guild of St. Luke, Cosmas & Damian (Guild of Catholic Doctors) is known to have the authority of the hierarchy behind it and is hardly noticed. Thus, we need an educated lay people, especially doctors who are prepared to defend the moral law in public, who will keep the media informed of medical progress and who will warn the people when dangerous situations could develop, e.g., unsuitable legislation.

A recent lecture in Dublin by Professor Ian Donald, world-renowned Obstetrician-Gynecologist from Glasgow, listed a dozen situations where the moral law as understood by Christians is being challenged. Abortion, contraception, sterilization, euthanasia seem well understood. The consideration of measures for population control, problems associated with genetic counselling, eugenic selective reproduction, diagnosis of sex-linked abnormality perhaps antenatally, non-resuscitation of severely handicapped, in vitro human fertilization, human embryonic life in vitro and growth of fetal tissue for transplanting, gives evidence that a great gap exists between those who believe what the Christian churches teach and all others. This only emphasizes the need for planned counterattacks to many emotionally charged and inaccurate articles and features of the communication media.

Thus, while the most obvious result of the entry of Ireland into the European Economic Community is rising prices and progress towards standardization of medical qualifications, we must face a situation where our insularity is lost and our age-old standards are challenged. This must be even more complex as we try to come more into line with the life style of our neighbouring countries, with a view to that integration which in the long run seems inevitable.

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